Reflections
01/22/12

The Fourth Presbyterian Church of Chicago is part of the Presbyterian Church(USA), one of the 11,000 Presbyterian congregations that constitute the denomination, whose total membership is slightly more than two million. And we are part of the Presbytery of Chicago, one hundred or so local Presbyterian Churches which functions like a kind of corporate bishop. Clergy and Elders from each congregation constitute the Presbytery Assembly which meets every other month, overseeing the life of its congregations and ministers. Presbyterian ministers are not members of local congregations, but members of Presbytery, even after they retire.

The relationship with the larger church is important. Congregations are started and organized by a Presbytery. And the national church has a global presence through its World Wide Mission with hundreds of Mission workers, including several who came out of this congregation: Josh Heikela in Ghana, Richard Williams, former Pastoral Resident and his wife, Mamie, in Columbia, Doug Pond with Opportunity International in Mozambique, Dr. Bernie Blauw at the AIDs clinic he founded and we help fund in Cameroon.

Three Fourth Presbyterian Church pastors have been elected Moderator of the General Assembly to serve one year terms, presiding at the meeting of the General Assembly and then representing the national church globally, nationally – and to its 170 Presbyteries.

John Timothy Stone, Harrison Ray Anderson, and I had the great honor and privilege of being elected to serve as the Moderator of the 208th General Assembly of the PC(USA) in 1996 and 1997. In each instance, Fourth Church gave its pastor to the larger church for a year.

Our primary Mission focus, outside of our own local mission projects, is through the agencies of the PC(USA).

And former Fourth Church member, Elder and Trustee, Linda Valentine is in her second term as the Executive Director of the General Assembly Mission Council. She is, essentially, the Chief Executive Officer of the large national and international Presbyterian Mission enterprise – and leads a national staff of 500 in our national headquarters in Louisville, Kentucky.

I know that Fourth Church will continue to be an active participant and leader in the Presbytery of Chicago – and the national church in the days ahead, and you should know that Presbyterians from all over the country and the world will be thinking about and praying for you in the transition period, the search for and election of a new pastor.

Most know by now that there are good Presbyterian policies for the process of retirement.

You will, later this morning, vote on my request that you and the Presbytery of Chicago dissolve the pastoral relationship on January 31st.

The Presbytery has already voted to do that.

I have signed a Covenant of Closure between the Fourth Presbyterian Church Session, the Personnel Committee and myself that we will – you and I – abide by. That after January 31st, I will not in any way intervene in the business of this congregation.

That I will not carry out any pastoral duties such as baptisms, weddings, funerals or memorial services.

Furthermore, I pledge to support fully the next pastor and look forward, following his or her establishment, to returning to the worshipping congregation on Sunday morning.

My hope and prayer is that members and friends alike will regard the time immediately ahead as the beginning of a great adventure. That you will make every effort to be here on Sunday morning – to support Calum MacLeod, Head of Staff, and the other Fourth Church staff. That you will continue to support this church financially in the days ahead.

That you will hold in your prayers the members of the Pastor Nominating Committee you will elect in several weeks. They will work very hard and put in many, many hours, and they will find for you, with the constant presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit, a new pastor for this amazing congregation, this Light in the City.